

Town signs Letter of Intent with Chinese community after 10-day mission

By Kathryn Boyle
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During council's regular meeting on April 11, the members of the delegation that went on a trade mission to Chengdu City, China updated the other members on their trip.

The 10-day trip, which was funded solely through donations— it had no financial impact on Halton Hills taxpayers— was presented to council in the form of a play-by-play and PowerPoint presentation by Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette.

The team, comprised of Bonnette, Ward 1 & 2 Regional Councillor Clark Somerville, Ward 2 Councillor Ted Brown, CAO and Fire Chief Brent Marshall, Economic Development Coordinator Danielle Edwards, Manager of Sustainability and Corporate Policy Advisor Damian Szybalski, Executive Director of Library Services and Culture Jane Diamanti, and Art Skidmore, President and CEO of Halton Hills Community Energy Corporation, arrived in China on March 21 after 18 hours of travel, finally reaching the hotel at around 3 a.m.

One of the first things the delega-

tion did on their trip was meet up with a former Georgetown resident, Suad Cejvanovic, who showed the delegation around the New Century Global Center: a 20 million sq. ft. building with thousands of stores, some of them Canadian, a movie theatre, a university, a swimming pool and a hotel.

On March 23, the group went to a formal meeting where serious discussions took place around a possible Letter of Intent. Later, they went to the Chengdu Planning Exhibition Hall where they learned about the province's irrigation system and future plans.

On March 25, the mayor signed a two-year Letter of Intent with Chinese officials to begin discussions on twinning with the Wenjiang District, located in the Municipality of Chengdu. Wenjiang is marking itself as China's Silicon Valley. The Letter of Intent revolves around economic development and investment, to best practices in environmental sustainability and the promotion of culture, agriculture and tourism.

Later, they toured the Chengdu Medical University, where they dis-



As part of Town of Halton Hills Trade Mission delegation, March 25, Mayor Rick Bonnette engaged in discussions with Tian Rong, (right), Vice Mayor of Chengdu Municipal People's Government as a "Letter of Intent" was signed to establish friendly relations and cooperation between Halton Hills and Wenjiang District, located in the Municipality of Chengdu China.

Photo courtesy The Town of Halton Hills

cussed the possibility of student exchanges.

On March 28, the group had no meetings to attend and spent the day climbing the Great Wall of China.

"I think every member of the delegation was just fascinated at how... you can see the Great Wall as far as the eye can see," Bonnette said. "It's amazing it was built so many thousands of years ago and it still stands today."

On March 29, the delegation had a meeting in Beijing with the Canadian Embassy where they learned of the benefits of partnering with a city like Chengdu.

On April 4, a week after returning

from the trip, the Town received a letter from Canada's Ambassador to China Guy Saint-Jacques, expressing the federal government's support of the twinning intention and the benefits of the agreement in local economics and trade.

"We were on a new adventure as the Town of Halton Hills and I think it's one that we can be proud of," Bonnette said.

After Bonnette spoke, Edwards presented the trip itinerary, the letter from Saint-Jacques and some news articles. She then played a television news segment that aired in China about the delegation's visit.

Brown shared his sentiments on the trip, explaining the days were long and the rests were short, but it was all worth it.

"The question is, where do we go now?" he said. "I think the future has the potential to make some great strides in promoting Halton Hills in a global arena. I believe the effectiveness of this establishment relationship is unlimited by the imagination of those sitting around the council table."

Bonnette then told the delegation staff is working diligently to create a comprehensive multi-year action plan, with a business case to support a twinning.

"I think any time Halton Hills is mentioned in a world stage is a benefit to us, it's a benefit to what we have here, and it may lead to more investment," he said. "I support the staff recommendation that we give the staff time to come back and work on a comprehensive action plan and that everyone be patient. We're not going to see something happen overnight."

He finished his comments with the intention of Wenjiang officials to come to Halton Hills in June and to sign another Letter of Intent here.

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